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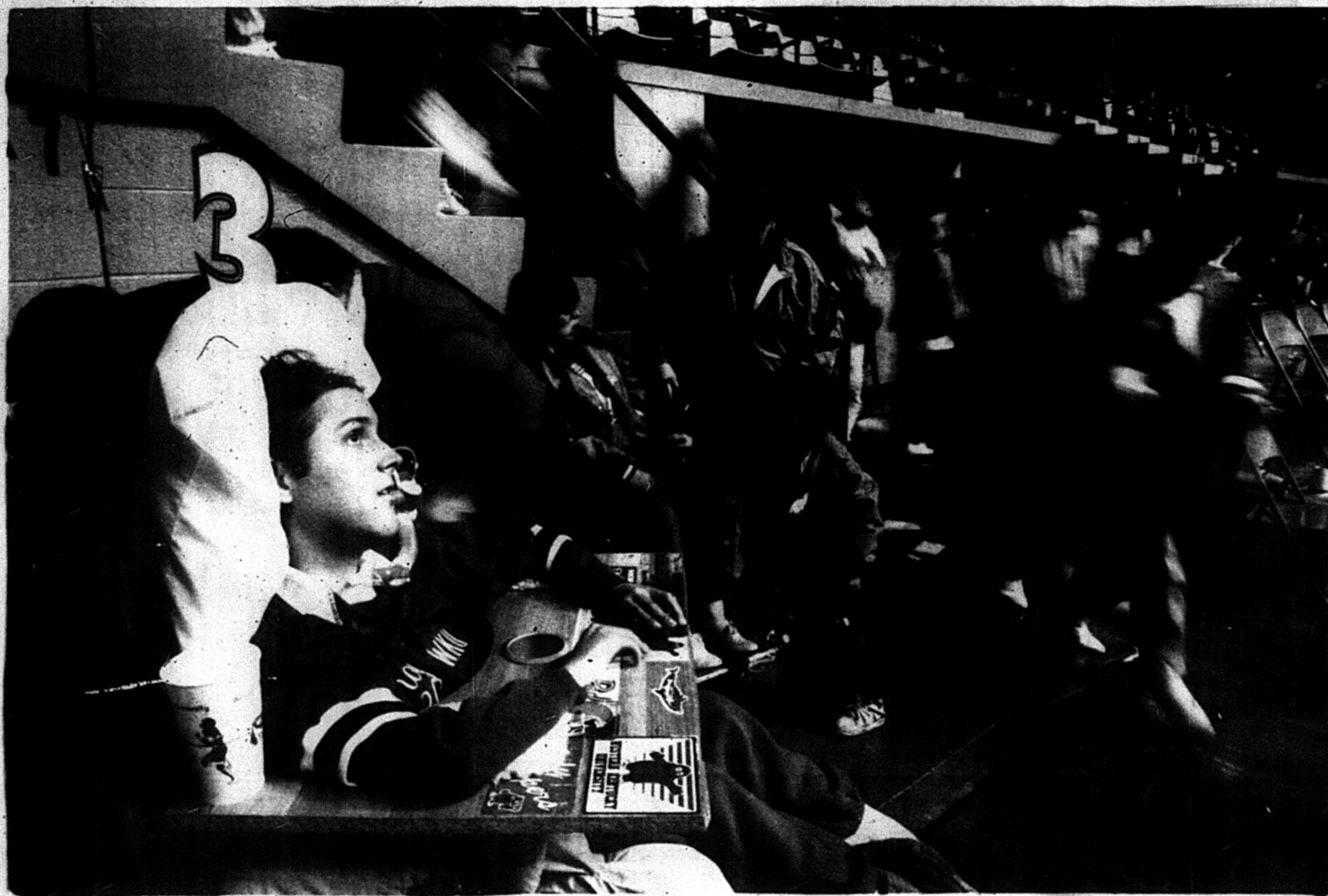
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Root
for the
home
team

.....

A Part
Of
Experiencing

Fiction by Mike Nickel



J.D. BUSSE
The guy who picks the stories
STEVE SMART
The sultan of Nikonovia

3

Sammy knew so little about women, he thought a vulva was a high-priced German car. Then he joined a swim club.

4

Troy Liscomb calls himself Western's #1 fan, even though his Muscular Dystrophy won't let him stand and cheer his favorite team.

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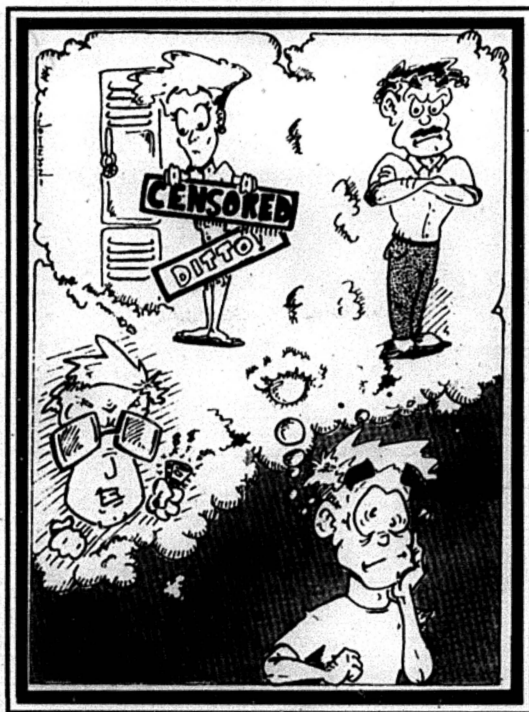
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A Part of

By Mike Nickel. I had always equated a woman's anatomy with microscopes, test tubes, beakers and Bunsen burners. Everything was explained so scientifically by the adults of the world. I was a 12-year-old kid whose only self-discovered knowledge of the sexes was that boys look different from girls. All other information I gained second hand. My own male body was quite familiar to me, though. I was even aware of what would be happening to it in a scant few years. All my young mind knew about women, however, was that they were made up of parts with names like breasts, wombs and ovaries. Not until an embarrassingly older age did I understand that the vulva is the external part of a woman's genitalia and not a high-priced German car.

Ms. Love — my fifth grade teacher — was the one who set me straight.

Ms. Love had the body of a twenty-two year-old, which was only reasonable since that was her age as well. She had replaced our regular fifth grade teacher after he had himself a little fit in front of the class and injured my best friend John Ware. Ms. Love came in, fresh from a full semester of student teaching, and confused a class of thirty-three kids as to what the relationship between authority and subservience should be. She taught through the use of games, and used pictures as much as possible so that we could all "see" the point she was trying to make. It was an amazing comfort to have a teacher closer to my own



age than to the age of my parents.

"We learn by seeing and doing and experiencing," she would say. "There's only so much we can learn from listening." At this point she would either ask for volunteers to help with a demonstration, or she would put an album on the classroom's outdated record player and ask someone to dance. Almost everyone would raise his hand and whine for her attention. She would grab whoever was closest to her and start dancing. "Everyone must dance," she would demand. "This is all part of experiencing."

She had a lime green bikini that was really small. She had a boyfriend, too. I often saw them both at the swim center my parents signed me up for instead of having me stay alone in the house until they got home from work. Somewhere in my parents' collective mind they decided that the house was a dangerous place for a young boy, but the deep end was completely safe. My parents exempted my brother from their after-school program. He was old enough to hang out with his friends after school, but was too much of a corrupting influence for them to leave me in his custody. I would ride the school bus which stopped near the pool, and swim until my mom would pick me up.

[See Experience Page 6]

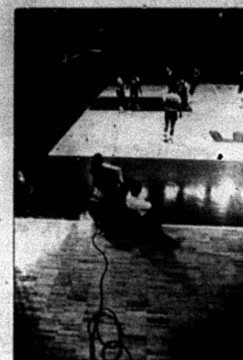
Experiencing

ROOT

for the

HOME TEAM

Twenty-three-year-old Troy Liscomb can't tie his shoes, can't swallow and can breathe only with the help of a ventilator. Troy can't do any of those things, but that doesn't keep him from going to all of Western's basketball games



Their emotions are the same.

Basketball players anticipate a three-pointer, shun a missed foul shot, hiss at a bad call.

So does Troy Liscomb.

Players strive and plot strategies for a win.

So does Troy.

Players pace up and down the floor to the sound of squeaking tennis shoes, their breathing heavy and strong, their muscles working.

But Troy can't. His Muscular Dystrophy won't let him.

He can't stand up, sit down, feed, bathe or clothe himself. If he has an itch, someone has to scratch it. If he wants a drink, someone has to get it for him.

Anything that Troy needs someone has to do for him. He can't even breathe on his own.

But he is just as much a part of Western's basketball teams as the players themselves. After all, he does call himself Western's biggest fan.

For 19 years, Troy has lived with Muscular Dystrophy and for 18 years he has followed the Tops. Now, at age 23, his muscles are nearly gone.

He has gone from a normal 4-year-old boy who could run and play sports to an 8-year-old who had to walk with braces to a 10-year-old confined to a wheelchair for life.

While most people would say that's no way to live, Troy believes otherwise.

There's a vigorous spirit bubbling in his skinny, bony 100-pound body. It's a spirit that keeps him alive, a spirit that forces him to push on day after day even though doctors say it's only a matter of time before Muscular Dystrophy takes his life.

Troy draws his spirit from sports, especially Western's men's and women's basketball teams.

His parents, Bill and Judy, realize it. That's why they've committed their lives to keeping Troy happy, especially since one

[Continued on Page 6]



IN A GAME AGAINST JACKSONVILLE UNIVERSITY, BILL, JUDY AND TAMMY, TROY'S OLDER SISTER, REACT TO A BASKET BY THE TOPPERS. NEXT TO TAMMY IS DONALD DURFEY, TAMMY'S LITTLE BROTHER IN BOWLING GREEN'S BIG BROTHER AND SISTER PROGRAM. THE LISCOMBS, ESPECIALLY TROY, CONSIDER THEMSELVES THE TOPPERS' BIGGEST FANS. TROY CAN'T STAND, JUMP OR SHOUT FOR THE TEAM, BUT HIS SPIRIT MAKES UP FOR HIS PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS.

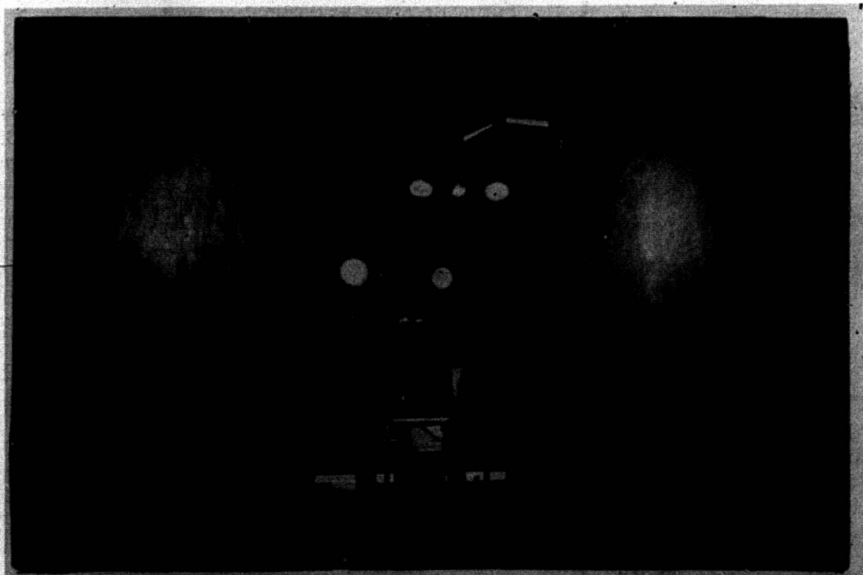
By
Chris Poynter
Photos by
Marc Piscotty



NO MATTER WHERE THE HILLTOPPERS PLAY, THE LISCOMBS FOLLOW IN THEIR RECREATIONAL VEHICLE. BILL LISCOMB SAYS HE TAKES TWO OF EVERYTHING BECAUSE WITH TROY'S CONDITION HE HAS TO BE PREPARED FOR THE WORST.



TROY'S PARENTS NEVER KNOW WHAT OBSTACLES THEY MAY FACE WHEN GOING TO A STRANGE CITY. NOT EVERY ARENA IS EQUIPPED TO DEAL WITH PEOPLE IN TROY'S CONDITION.



BILL AND TROY VISIT THE SUPERDOME IN NEW ORLEANS. "WE GO THROUGH HELL AND HIGH WATER JUST TO GET HIM WHERE HE WANTS TO GO OR TO DO WHATEVER HE WANTS TO DO," BILL SAID.

Troy

(Continued from Page 4) son has already died from Muscular Dystrophy.

They go to all lengths to get Troy to every Tops basketball game, home or away. They are the first fans at the games and the last to leave.

Wherever Troy wants to go, you can bet the Liscombs will pack their old red-and-white mobile home and be there.

"We go through hell and high water just to get him where he wants to go or to do whatever he wants to do," Bill said. "It's like going to the Superdome. It was no big deal, but he wanted to see it. And if that's what he wants to see, we go see it. If that makes him happy, that's what we live for."

It's 4:30 p.m. Feb. 2 and the Liscombs are on their way to Ruston, Ala., for the Louisiana Tech-Western game. After that game, they will head to Mobile, Ala., to see Western battle the Jaguars of South Alabama. Total trip: 2,300 miles in five days.

The radio is blaring with Credence Clearwater Revival's "Proud Mary." Bill keeps the beat by tapping his fingers on the steering wheel and Troy is singing — his high-pitched voice barely audible. Judy sits next to Troy on a brown bar stool.

Cars speed by. Bill keeps a steady speed-limit pace.

The mobile home with "WKO" painted on the sides captures stars from passers-by.

Inside is a cozy home with a red decor — Western pennants, stickers of Big Red, a Western lamp and red towels are scattered everywhere.

This is the Liscombs' home away from home, equipped with a kitchen, three beds, a table and a bathroom.

Troy sits in his brown reclining chair staring into the distance.

A blue tube runs from a hole in his neck to a square ventilator machine covered with buttons, lights and gauges.

The machine tubes expand and contract 12 times each minute to force air into Troy's lungs.

The machine is just part of the equipment that makes traveling a hassle. There's also the oxygen tank, hospital bed and suctioning machine, which clears the saliva from Troy's throat. But no matter the trouble, Bill and Judy have made a promise.

"We made up our minds. It's rough, but we feel Troy loves it," Judy said. "If he's happy, we're happy. But it's not easy; it's tough on everybody."

Life hasn't been easy on the Liscombs. It started when Troy was born.

He wasn't gaining weight, had trouble walking and talking and was slow sitting up.

For years tests showed nothing. After changing doctors, the bomb hit. Troy was 4.

"The doctor said, 'I have something to say to you and it's not going to be easy for either one of you, but I think your son has Muscular Dystrophy,'" Judy said. "Bill and I were floored."

As a safeguard, doctors also tested Troy's infant brother Terry, only to find he also had it.

"I broke down," Judy said. "I went to pieces."

"I had it in my mind surely God wouldn't give me two sons with this disease. There has to be a reason for what God does. I don't know if it's punishment or if it's that he thought I could handle it, but there had to be a reason. He gave us one that was going to be disabled, but two?"

Bill reacted similarly.

"We kept praying to God 'Is this right? Did we do something wrong?'"

Both Troy and Terry were struck with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, which progressively destroys muscles. It's hereditary through the mother. Duchenne patients normally live until their early 20s.

Terry died in 1988 at age 14.

His memory lives in a picture of the smiling, chubby boy sitting in front of their mobile home. At the Liscomb's house on Spruce Trail in Bowling Green there is the "red room" dedicated to Terry's memory.

The "red room" is covered with Western paraphernalia. The ceiling is even painted the exact color of red that is on the Diddle Arena floor.

"Terry loved the basketball court, so I painted the ceiling so he'd look up and think he was on the basketball court," Bill said, his voice falling off as he scanned the room.

Living through one death and preparing for another hasn't been easy. They try not to think about it.

"It's just a matter of how long Troy wants to live," Judy said, near tears. "He'll tell me several times, just between him and me, 'I don't want to die, Mom. I don't want to die.'"

Troy tries to block death from his mind.

"Every once and a while I just cry," Troy said, looking away. "I just go on and try not to think about it."

The aroma of spicy fried chicken and the whirr of a hand blender mixing mashed potatoes fill the mobile home, now in Mobile, Ala.

As Judy prepares dinner, Troy and his father watch ESPN.

After eating, it's time to get ready for the game.

Bill and Judy lift Troy from his brown recliner to his wheelchair and load his portable life-support system.

It's difficult and takes time — that's why they are usually at the game two hours before tip-off.

"Sure it's a hardship — and financially it's devastating, we're in so much debt. But I figure so what?" Bill said. "I'm only going to

have him for a few years so I spend every dime I can on him."

Judy doesn't have a job — she devotes every minute tending to Troy. Bill is a handyman who works when the family isn't on the road.

At the arena, people — particularly children — stare at Troy. It's something the Liscomb family has gotten used to.

Western basketball players come to greet Troy and, as customary, Coach Ralph Willard comes to solicit Troy's advice.

"He certainly gives us inspiration," Willard said. "Troy is a real battler with a great spirit and a tremendous heart. He's also very critical of us. But it certainly puts all your problems in perspective when you see how courageous Troy is."

"I have all the respect in the world for Troy and his family," said Paul Sanderford, women's basketball coach. "Their outlook on life makes me feel badly about getting down on things. There are a lot of worse things in the world than losing a game."

Although he can't yell loudly, clap his hands or stand up and cheer, Troy's emotions pour out.

There is a glitter in his eyes as he scouts the team's every move. There is excitement in his voice when he cheers a basket and disgust for a missed shot.

Of the 3,000-member crowd, only the Liscombs are cheering for the Tops, who take another road loss.

The frown on Troy's face tells it all.

But as long as Troy strives for life, there'll be more games, more time to cheer and more time to travel.

"Why he keeps going," Bill said, "and why his little muscles he has left keep going, only the Lord knows."

Experience

(Continued from Page 3) Ms. Love and I were unaware of each other's pending membership when we joined. At the pool she would ignore me for the most part, unless I was right in front of her face or there was no denying my presence. And then she would just say, "Hi, Sammy. I haven't seen you in a while." She would smile, knowing that she had just dismissed me from school less than an hour earlier.

Her boyfriend was named Gene. I gathered this from the name he had monogrammed on the back of his shirt. I don't think Gene ever wore a different shirt other than his monogrammed one — not ever. He wore it every damned day. And even though I didn't have a crush on Ms. Love, I had every right to have a crush on her, but I didn't. I felt a little jealous when it came to him. What was so special about him that he could wear the same shirt every day and not disgust a woman like my teacher?

I constantly found myself hurrying into the men's locker room to change into my swim trunks so I could get a chair behind the high dive. It was from this point I could peek around the diving board's ladder to see where Ms. Love and Gene would always lie. I figured that if I got my space first, then I wouldn't look to them like I was spying. Of course, I was spying, but it was important that they not know that, and by grabbing my vantage point first, I would not be conspicuous.

Again, I did not have a crush on Ms. Love. I wasn't exactly in lust with her, either. Feelings of strong sexual desire didn't plague me until two or three years down the road. What I was feeling was a strong desire to see my teacher in a lime green bikini, with oil on her belly, and her making no effort to hide it — not from me, or the scum-

scraper boy, or even God. I guess I was fulfilling some kind of innocent, pre-pubescent voyeuristic fantasy. But what was really neat about the whole thing was that she was an educator — an untouchable — and while I wasn't exactly touching, I was doing some looking on a level that none of my elementary school cronies could conceive.

"You lie, you lie, you lie," my friends would tell me after hearing the stories of my pecking experiences. I would try to convince them that what I was telling them was true; I'd tell them that I had, in fact, seen her stomach, but they always turned their heads from me and called me a liar. Then, when no one else was around, each would come to me individually and ask what she looked like.

I didn't tell them.

On Fridays, Ms. Love and Gene were always at the pool. They would miss a day or so during the middle of the week, but they were always there on Friday afternoons. I think it was some kind of celebration of the weekend, or something. I personally didn't care as much for the weekend as did the adult people. Weekends, in my family, were like retribution on the kids. The parents would relax and hand out chores to my brother and me on Saturdays. On Sundays, we would be forced to wake up extra early for Sunday School. We didn't do much learning about religion there. We did, however, hear a lot of rambling from Mrs. Pulley about how men get "stupider and stupider" as years go by. She made me want the meaty part of the week to start again so I could go back to school and the swim club.

On Fridays I would rush extra fast to get my spot. On one Friday the sun was little closer to the Earth, because it was really hot, and I figured that Ms. Love would get significantly greasier for the occasion. I hurried with my swim trunks and ran (yes, I broke pool rule number one and ran) out of

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the locker room and dove into the pool. It was important to look as though I had been swimming for a while before Ms. Love ever showed up. And so I would saturate my body and hair with water. This time, however, my disregard for detail caused my trunks to slip halfway off and reveal a healthy portion of 12-year-old butt cleavage. I hate that, so I climbed out, only to discover that my drawstring had sucked all the way up into the right side of my trunks. This, of course, left an embarrassingly long drawstring on the left side. It hung down and almost touched my knees. I would not have Ms. Love (or Gene) see me with an abnormal string and butt cleavage.

As I hurried back to the locker room, I tried to coerce the right side of my string to come out of hiding. This was my mother's responsibility, but I knew that if I were successful in fixing it, I would be taking another step toward my gradual trek to independence. I fumbled with it and thought about what Ms. Love would look like, and would I break down and tell my friends about it once I knew. I also wondered why, when Gene rubbed oil on her, he would rub not only on her back, but also down the back of her thighs and even to the pits of her knees — sometimes even to her calves. Why would she let him rub her in places where it was so obvious she could rub herself?

Thoughts such as these interfered with my string fixing. I thought about them as I walked into the locker room. "This is different-looking tile," I thought to myself as I passed the door's threshold and kept on walking. I

looked up to see if the walls were a different color, too. They were. "Where am I?" I wondered.

As if to answer me, coming around the corner from the showers, was Ms. Love. She had a towel over her head drying her hair, but I could recognize her anyway. "What was she doing in the men's locker room?" I asked myself. Then, I realized that she was not in the men's locker room, and neither was I. Then, even more startling, I discovered she was naked.

She was completely bare save for the towel which covered her face. Why her nudity wasn't the first thing I noticed, I'll never know. There she was, though. She was naked — a real live naked woman, and she was unaware of my presence. I knew that I could run out before the towel dropped, but I didn't. I stood and looked at her. I was looking at everything. I looked at her breasts. I couldn't look away; they appeared so natural. They weren't big, rubbery, funny-looking bulges deserving of the creative synonyms I had attached to them so joyfully in the past. They were proportioned, and slightly paler than the rest of her body, and looked almost as if they belonged there.

Do all women look like this? How about the girls at school, do they have bodies like this under their clothes? Am I the first person ever to have seen her naked? I thought of many questions, and while I didn't have time in my head to articulate each one into words — I was too fascinated with my first naked woman experience — the abstract thoughts were there.

She continued to dry her head. I

continued to scan her body.

"What's she doing with hair down there like that?" I asked myself. She had hair other places than on her scalp. God, that was interesting.

She pulled the towel off her face and saw me. There I stood, looking into her nakedness and fiddling with a string between my legs. I inhaled deeply and slapped my hands painfully over my eyes.

"I didn't see 'em! I didn't see nothin'!" I was trying to convince her of my innocence, but I was guilty. I saw everything. I saw her tan lines, her breasts, the uninterrupted curve of her hips; for the love of Jesus Christ, who walked on the water and fed the masses, I saw her Bunsen Burner!

"Sammy, get out of here!" "Yes, ma'am," I said. I turned and ran. I felt funny calling her "ma'am." After all, I knew exactly how big her breasts were. Didn't I deserve to address her in a less formal way than that?

Embarrassment would be the emotion that one would expect in my situation. That would come later. I felt fear; I felt shame. Oh, I know that peeking at her from around the diving board wasn't that different, but I was just a kid, right? But this — I saw her entire naked body with the exception of her scalp. I liked it, and that's the part that made me feel ashamed. Just the thought of it made me feel dirty. Who ever heard of a young boy being fascinated by naked women?

Running into the correct locker room, I rammed my head into Gene's chest. He was standing on the other side of the door, and I just ran into him. It hurt.

"Sammy," he said. "What's the

hurry?"

I tried not to look at him, but I did anyway. It was a day for looking, I guess.

"Are you all right?" Where did you get the nerve to be concerned with my welfare? "You don't look all right."

The guilt washed over me. I had seen an employee of the city with no clothes — my educator and his girlfriend. I started to cry.

This made Gene uncomfortable. "Why don't we go talk to Jennifer. She likes you."

Not anymore, I thought. I told him I wanted to be alone. I thought, "Ms. Love's first name is Jennifer?"

I hid in the locker room for the rest of the afternoon and ducked into one of the toilet stalls every time someone came in out of the fear that it might be Gene. Or worse yet, maybe it would be Ms. Love barging in to see me naked, thus getting her revenge. My mom came before they did.

"You lie, you lie, you lie!"

I told John Ware about it. He was the only one I told. He was my best friend, and I knew that he wouldn't pass judgment on me. I was right for the most part. He didn't call me a pervert, or a freak, or anything like that. He just called me a liar.

As for Ms. Love, she tried not to act any differently than before. She tried not to let me know that she thought I was a demented kid who would grow up to read nude magazines "just for the articles." She didn't want to let on to the girls of the class that I was a slobbering maniac waiting for them to put towels on their heads so I could steal a gander at their goods.

Earlie Broadway offered to pay me five dollars if I would draw a picture of her with no clothes. John had leaked the story. "No, Earlie, that's sick." He slinked away knowing I was right. I must admit, though, that later in the day I tried to draw the picture anyway, but it just looked like a two-dimensional line drawing of a man with a "W" for a chest.

I lived with my guilt until Wednesday. It was on Wednesday that Ms. Love decided that it was all right for experiencing. She brought out the record player and put a record on it.

"You know," she said, "you people really have a chance to be happy. Grown-ups make things so complicated. They pay good money to psychiatrists because they have a hard time smiling." She continued talking. Whenever she thought it was necessary for us to experience a little life she would always lead into it with a moral, or a life lesson.

"Nothing you ever do should make you feel unhappy. If you make a mistake, admit it and tell yourself that you won't do it again. Guilt and worry don't solve anything, they just give you wrinkles."

The needle on the record dropped. "You know what to do. Everyone must have fun."

She passed the person sitting closest to her and walked over to the corner where I was sitting. It was there that we danced.

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In addition to its built-in capabilities, the Macintosh Classic II can be equipped with up to 10 megabytes of RAM, so you'll be able to run several applications at once and work with large amounts of data.

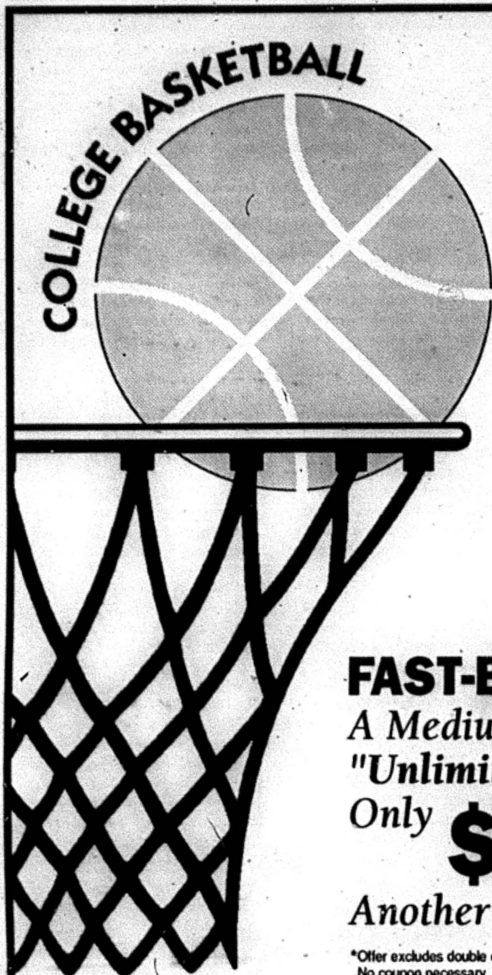
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